

MAY DAY ISSUE

# LABOUR MONTHLY

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Editor : R. Palme Dutt



## A Significant Congress

Analysed by John Gollan



## Lancashire Fights Back

Well-known Cotton-Weavers' leader, Harold Dickinson,  
tells the story

*Other Articles include*

**HONOUR TO WHOM  
HONOUR**

Some reflections by R.P.D.  
on Communist Party history

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who was there

**THE ARTISTS' ONE  
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A review-article by John  
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**TRADE UNIONS  
UNDER FIRE**

Defended by O. H. Parsons

**MAY · 1959**

One Shilling and Sixpence

# LION'S DEN

A DELEGATE to London the last time he was in Britain, that great Frenchman, Marcel Cachin, insisted on being driven through the heart of the City. The streets were deserted, for it was the weekend. He looked keenly about him. Everywhere the names of bankers and firms trading all over the world, from China to the Americas. Multi-millionaire firms with household names, exploiting the skill of how many scores of thousands and many generations of British workmen; making these names at the same time famous for the products of British craftsmanship and invention, and infamous for exploitation of the colonies in their insatiable greed for super-profits. No ostentation in buildings housing these countless Head Offices, nor need to display their wealth. They are strictly utilitarian, yet leave just space for those City Churches which are monuments to the piety—and profits—of those taking part in earlier commercial scrambles. There is one significant break in the pattern: searing through is the devastation caused by 'conventional' bombs and primitive rockets of German rivals through their strong-arm thugs, Hitler and his generals. Here we see 'the City's' foreign policy of thirty years ago coming back through their own roofs. Still to be seen on the bomb sites are the cracks in the paving stones, the strong rooms burst open, with loose-strife and bindweed growing from them. None of this was lost on the veteran editor of *L'Humanité*. 'How formidable this gang, the British bourgeoisie, still remains', said he—and then went on to express his feelings for the British working class, for the splendour of the struggle of those who fight this bludgeon-

wielding class enemy, no less than for their marvellous craftsmanship. This Easter I heard many foreign visitors express a like respect and confidence in the British workers. Amongst them, an Indian fraternal delegate to the Communist Party Congress spoke of the 'glorious common heritage of suffering in the struggle against British imperialism which neither time nor space can erase': he repeated Cachin's point, that 'to fight the lion in his own den is no easy task'. A Chinese visitor spoke movingly of support to his countrymen in their past struggles afforded by British workers, such as 'in opposing intervention during China's Great Revolution of 1925-27'. It was, he said, 'still fresh in the minds of the Chinese people', who today have warm feelings for all that we do 'for peace, democracy and socialism'. He added: 'Our age is truly a great age of the people'.

International solidarity is easily understood by British workers, for it springs from class loyalty; and that the working class in these islands learned very early in their long history. Take loyalty to their trade unions, their steady and principled defence of their representatives. A famous example, just a hundred years ago, was the struggle of London building workers in 1859 against the infamous 'Document Lockout'. Many features will seem startlingly familiar to those resisting attacks on shop stewards today. Recall the main facts: with trade depression and introduction of machinery, a Joint Committee of carpenters, joiners, masons and bricklayers addressed a memorial to the London master builders, to reduce hours from ten to nine, 'the present rate of wages to continue'. Hours were too long 'to afford either rest from exhaustion or time to improve the

*(Continued on page iii of cover)*

# HONOUR TO WHOM HONOUR

## Some Reflections on Communist Party History

R. Palme Dutt

[*The Editor, who is at the moment in hospital undergoing a second operation for cataract, this time on the other eye (thus completing the series, since human beings, unlike Argus of the hundred eyes, have fortunately only two eyes), hopes to resume the regular Notes of the Month in the July issue. The June Notes will be written by the Associate Editor.—R.P.D.*]

**T**HE true history of Socialism and the Socialist working class movement in Britain is not likely to be written before the final victory. When that time comes, values will be changed. Men and

women in all parts of the country who have fought truly without reward or recognition will receive a respect which will be denied to many who today may strut more large upon the stage.

At the time when this book\* of Mr. Pelling, purporting to give a history of the Communist Party, was read to me (for I had not yet recovered the use of my eyes), I also had the *Daily Worker* and asked first, as always, to be read the classified advertisements, from which one can learn of what goes on in the movement. There was the following:

*Death.* The Blackburn Branch C.P. regrets to announce the passing on October 4 of Tom Catlow (at 75 years). Foundation member of the Communist Party and a life-long member and executive member of the local Weavers' Union. He always said: 'Future generations would reap a rich reward from what we did today'.

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\**The British Communist Party: An Historical Profile.* Henry Pelling. A. & C. Black. 18s.

I did not have the privilege of personally knowing Tom Catlow. But I have known hundreds of men and women in every part of the country like this comrade. Their life history has been in every way a moving record of courage, honesty, loyalty to their fellow human beings, hardship, victimisation and deprivation, borne without complaining—unepic and unsung. For them there have been no rewards save to serve: no easy careers, parliamentary prospects, office or pickings or press glorification, though all awaiting in abundance any one of them who would only say the word of betrayal and pass over. The glory of the record of such men and women in our time, who have been the heart of the old Socialist movement, and who have composed the strength of the Communist Party, or in the militant movement alongside it, has been the streak of light which has illuminated an otherwise sordid and cynical period of a corrupt society in decay.

### *Record of Forty Years*

Consider the record of these forty years. All that is remembered and celebrated with pride and honour by the entire labour movement today, during these past four decades of the foundation and existence of the Communist Party, such as the *Jolly George* which prepared the way for the Councils of Action; or Red Friday and the industrial militant upsurge which prepared the heroic class solidarity of the General Strike; the Unemployed Hunger Marches (banned at the time by the T.U.C. and Labour Party until the support of the movement compelled a change); the barring of the road to Mosley; the fight for Spanish democracy and the role of the International Brigade; the at first lone stand against Munich; the campaign for the Second Front; the smashing of the wage-freeze after the war; or the at first almost isolated battle against the American military domination of Britain and nuclear warfare now taken up on a widely extended front but still to be won; all these have time and again sprung—not in terms of some sectional claim, but by the demonstrable facts and dates of the record—from the initiative of the Communists and the Communist Party.

Similarly all that is today remembered with shame and anger by the whole labour movement: the betrayal of the General Strike; the ignominious collapse of the second Labour Government and the passing over of the principal Labour leaders to Toryism; the support of the ban on arms to Spanish democracy; the god-speed to Munich; or Bevin's sell-out of Britain to the United States: all these

have stemmed from those who have been most prominent in opposing and denouncing Communism.

Such is the already proved historical record during these forty years of the long-term significance of communism and anti-communism in the British working-class movement, even in this initial phase—for we are still in the phase of the advance to the socialist revolution in Britain—while the Communist Party is still small, still universally execrated, derided and regularly declared at the point of death by all the representatives of wealth and privilege and their paid servants and scribes.

### *A Caricature of History*

Of this living reality of the Communist Party, whether in its human terms, or in its political and historical significance, no trace will be found in this narrow conventional police novelette, industriously compiled from the standpoint of Transport House and Scotland Yard, with the aid of the fictions and garbage of all the informers, agents and kindred sources solemnly treated as gospel, by this academic Don, remote from any contact with the working-class struggle or understanding of Socialism or Revolution.

John Gordon, editor of the *Sunday Express*, told the Press Commission that it was a remarkable thing that if you had an item in a paper about an event in which you had taken part, the item always got the facts wrong. If this happens to ordinary reporting on every-day events, how much more must it be expected to happen on a subject on which normal standards of accuracy or verifying evidence are regarded as superfluous, and the attitude of superior contempt and scorn by pygmies is regarded as obligatory in the polite orthodox world? Simple confusions and errors of facts or dates, such as could be freely cited from the pages of this book, can happen to any historian. But when I read in Mr. Pelling the account of any episode in which I might happen to have had some direct knowledge and connection, I found myself transported into a strange new world which bore little relation to the elementary facts.

### *Foundation of the Party*

A few simple examples. First, the foundation of the Party. It might have seemed natural and obvious that, since the strongholds of the organised industrial working class, of working-class socialist

consciousness and militancy, were at that time in the centres of mining and heavy industry in Scotland and South Wales, these should provide the main initial basis and leading elements of a revolutionary proletarian party. But such simple explanations would never be sufficient to satisfy the detective ingenuity of Mr. Pelling, for whom these elements represent 'the Celtic fringe'.

Similarly with regard to the younger revolutionary intellectuals who joined in the foundation of the new Party. These 'joined of course for no other reasons than that they admired the success of the Russian Bolsheviks in accomplishing their revolution' (p. 17). Nonsense, Mr. Pelling. These youngsters were certainly representatives of a section of a new generation highly disrespectful to established institutions and their leaders, including the dominant sections of the labour movement. But they had already broken their infant teeth in the old socialist movement, whether in the semi-revolutionary upsurge before the first world war, the old rebel pre-1914 *Daily Herald*, or the battle of the socialist minority which remained faithful to the principles of socialist internationalism in the first world war. Personally, I had had experience of one military and two civil prisons and had been sent down (expelled) from Oxford for the crime of propaganda for Marxism before any Bolshevik Revolution had taken place. Indeed, in June, 1917, I had moved and carried a resolution at a joint meeting of Student Societies that a second Socialist Revolution would be necessary in Russia, if the counter-revolution were not to conquer, and that we should pledge support to the coming second Socialist Revolution. We called ourselves communists and proclaimed the aim of the dictatorship of the proletariat before most of us had anything but the most fragmentary knowledge about Lenin or the Bolsheviks. We did not become communists because we supported the Russian Revolution. We supported the Russian Revolution because we were already communists.

### *Early Years*

Then the early years of the Party. The political leadership and campaigning of these years disappears from view. Attention is concentrated on the internal party development, which had its importance, but only in a wider context. These were the years of the transition from the initial basis of the amalgamation of the old Socialist sects to a more effective basis of organised mass work, facing outwards to the broad labour movement, with development

of democratic machinery for the election of the Executive by the Congress, organised unity of action alongside democratic discussion, and similar innovations.

Mr. Pelling tries to transform this development into a kind of mysterious Comintern plot operated by a special Comintern representative acting through a Commission of three. He states that 'at a special conference of the British Party in March, 1922, a Commission of three members was appointed to translate the Comintern instructions into recommendations for re-shaping the British Party', and that 'to assist them in their work they had, as Comintern special representative in Britain, Michael Borodin' (p. 21).

Wrong in every particular. The Commission of three was not appointed by the St. Pancras Conference in March, 1922. What happened at the St. Pancras Conference was very different. A resolution, or rather amendment, was carried against the Executive for the appointment of such a Commission from non-E.C. and non-official members of the Party ('should be elected by the Executive not from its own members or Head Office staff'), with full powers to go into all questions of the Party's work. This resolution was the expression of an insurgent rank-and-file dissatisfied with the existing situation and with the majority of the existing leadership regarded as mainly representative of the old sects. The resolution was carried at the Congress against the opposition of the Executive by 87 votes to 38. It was of course a preposterous and outrageous Congress decision to carry in any mature and developed Party, and was in fact equivalent to a declaration of war on the existing Executive. But these were still the teething times of the Party. The battle between the Commission and the representatives of the older leadership continued for some time, and was even intensified when the next Congress at Battersea in October, 1922, not only adopted all the Commission's recommendations but also elected two of its members at the head of the poll for the first nationally elected Executive in front of the older and better-known leaders. There may well have been some natural resentment and a little conservatism from the side of some of the older leaders, and a good deal of crudeness and intolerance from the side of the young insurgents, especially when they saw the measures they advocated sweep forward with the beginning of organised work to assist the advance of the broad labour movement, and an accompanying sixfold increase in the circulation of the Party organ within a few months, thus laying the foundations for a broad leftward advance in the general labour movement. But Borodin? Between Borodin and the Com-

mission there was no contact whatever. Very much on the contrary. The sudden eruption of this revolt from below, with its apparent demagogic success in sweeping the Party, and that certain measure of conflict with the older and tested leadership, may have aroused some apprehension among the more experienced heads in other Parties in the international movement. And indeed the succeeding international conference in 1923, to consider the 'English crisis' with the aid of representatives of other Parties, served to restore the balance and save the old leadership who had begun to be openly threatened with wholesale removal.

All this is long past now. The true history of parties especially in the early stages, can sometimes go through such mixed episodes, in the course of which the personal element appears emphasised at the time, but through which the party all the time goes forward. But poor Mr. Pelling, with his one *idée fixe* that everything that happens in the British Party is dictated by Moscow, is a hundred miles away from what really happened.

### *More Fictions*

In the same way every episode recorded in this book could be instructively contrasted with the actual facts. One gem worth noting is when he describes the Workers' and Peasants' Party of India, built up by the Indian Communists and also with Indian militant trade union leaders and left Congressmen, as a 'satellite' of the British Communist Party. He ignores the fact that the Indian Communists had already been through their baptism of fire in the Cawnpore conspiracy trial launched against them by the first Labour Government, just as the Meerut trial was launched by the second Labour Government. The role of an honoured working-class fighter like Ben Bradley who, after serving on the London District Committee of the Amalgamated Engineering Union, and with all the possibilities of a leading official career before him, preferred to go where the battle was hardest and hottest, to assist the young Indian trade union movement, and stood in the dock with the Indian working-class leaders to receive his sentence of 12 years' transportation from a British judge, was an immortal example of international working-class solidarity, still loved and cherished by the Indian workers, which would be a closed book to Mr. Pelling.

It would take too long to chase all the plain errors of fact, confusions or distortions which litter the pages of Mr. Pelling's book. De Leon did not found the I.W.W. (or Industrial Workers of

the World) (p. 2). The account of 'two British Communist Parties' in the summer of 1920 (p. 11) is unaware of the role of the Communist Labour Party in Scotland. The capture of two secret police agents hiding under the platform in the Rehearsal Theatre, Bedford Street, in 1924 did not take place 'where the party executive was due to hold a meeting' (p. 29), but where a London District Conference of the party was in session. It did not precede the Labour Government (p. 29) but took place under Arthur Henderson as Home Secretary, and the party organ published photo copies of extracts of the secret police notebooks (containing laborious notes of private talks of party members marked 'Official Secret'), and challenged Henderson to prosecute. The description of the formation of the United Mineworkers of Scotland as a 'breakaway' (p. 56) ignores the preceding action of the reformist officials in refusing to accept the result of democratic elections. The solid mass resistance of the working people of East London, which saved London from Mosley and his thugs, with police aid, dominating the streets of London as Hitler had dominated Berlin, is described as a policy to 'match disorder with disorder'. The membership of the party in June, 1941, was not 'probably' an imaginary figure from the writer's inner consciousness (p. 120), but 19,000, representing the first stage of the rise from 17,700 before the war to 22,700 by the end of 1941. Gallacher was never General Secretary of the party (p. 113). The statement that the defeat of revisionism at the 25th Congress was due to the fact that 'with the representation of the Executive and of the District Committees Congress was always heavily weighted in the direction of the official line' (p. 178) ignores the plain fact that E.C. members had no voting powers, the twenty-one District Committees 2 votes each, and that of the 547 delegates with voting powers 505 or 92 per cent were branch delegates directly elected by the branches. It would require a very odd mentality to regard this as 'weighting' of the votes in favour of the leading committees. If the representation and voting power at Labour Party Conferences were similarly based, in respect of over nine-tenths of the delegates, on direct election of delegates by the local organisations of the rank and file membership from below, it is probable that the resulting policy and leadership of the Labour Party would be very different from what it is today.

### *Five Fatal Flaws*

More important than pursuing detail errors or distortions is to consider why Mr. Pelling has so signally failed, despite all his

industrious documentation, to understand his subject or give anything approaching a correct record. In his previous work on the Labour Party he had shown capacity. Something else has got in the way. Five fatal flaws, arising from a hopelessly indoctrinated cold war outlook accepting all the dogmas of the Foreign Office and Transport House as gospel truth, have paralysed his faculties.

*First Fatal Flaw.* His blind acceptance of the official dogma that the British Communist Party, like all Communist Parties, must be regarded as an offshoot and instrument of the Soviet state and Soviet foreign policy, and that all its activities must be interpreted in terms of Russian instructions. He has not realised that the international communist movement existed before the Russian Revolution, and that the British Communist Party is the direct successor of the original socialist movement in Britain, inheriting all its characteristics, virtues and vices, weaknesses and problems, but entering into and learning from the experience of the era of the world socialist revolution. Communism is no more the product of Moscow machinations than the class struggle is the product of agitators. Where this folly leads Mr. Pelling in misinterpreting facts to fit his preconceived dogma we have shown in concrete examples.

Mr. Pelling is probably too young to know from experience that those of us who fought in the old socialist movement before the Russian Revolution were accused of being 'German agents' rioting on 'German gold'. He repeats all the stories about 'Russian gold', and then merely remarks on the odd fact that, despite the 'Russian gold', 'the members remained individually on the verge of destitution . . . tuberculosis seemed to be endemic among them, killing several of their leaders and crippling others'. If facts do not fit a theory, so much the worse for the facts.

*Second Fatal Flaw.* Arising from the first, everything that happens in the party must be interpreted as a trick, a manoeuvre, the opposite of what might appear. Does Pollitt resign the secretaryship on grounds of health? Of course it is only 'ostensibly' on grounds of health, but really because he 'felt it wise in the political situation to retire' (p. 171). This kind of speculation is the conventional small change of all political gossips and wiseacres. But for a serious historian a simple attempt to check the medical records would have ruled out this repetition of idle chatter. What Mr. Pelling could not know is that, when the doctors' peremptory orders came, the problem was in fact discussed that retirement at this

moment would inevitably be interpreted by critics as a political decision; and that Pollitt himself cut the Gordian knot by declaring that postponement would make no difference, since, whenever it came, it would automatically be interpreted in the same way in terms of the current political situation. Therefore, in the best Marxist tradition, '*lascia dir le genti*'—let the Crankshaws and the Pellings prattle.

*Third Fatal Flaw.* The third cause of falsification is the dependence on the most dubious and suspect sources—police files, Tory Blue Books on Communism, informers, or the self-inflating legends and malice of minor deserters. On this kind of foundation a marvellous 'Historical Profile' of Chartism could be written. Any historian has necessarily to take into account all types of sources, but he has also to be capable of weighing them. The type of renegade who in the United States or Britain rushes to pour out 'confessions' or highly paid 'sensational revelations' in the more vulgar organs of the millionaire press, is usually the lowest of the low; and the historian who trusts to such sources for his information damns himself.

*Fourth Fatal Flaw.* The fourth obstacle which rules out any attempt at a serious history of the militant working class movement is the bland police outlook which regards any revolutionary working class agitation and organisation as a conspiracy to be put down by all means, and against which all means, such as police action or bans and proscriptions, are legitimate. The repeated police attacks and prosecutions are related, not even with the normal mild deprecation of a moderate liberal, but with unconcealed sympathy for the problems and difficulties of the police in suppressing the evil thing. Thus the nearest approach to criticism is the judgment that the Tory Government's prosecution of the twelve Communist leaders in 1925, and their sentencing to prison, which was in fact the preparation for breaking the General Strike, was 'on the whole, a mistake', not because the author expresses any objection to sending Communist leaders to prison, but because 'it provided them with a golden opportunity for the advertisement of their views' (p. 34). The 'abnormally high proportion of Communists arrested' during the General Strike was 'principally because the Communists enjoyed the martyrdom of arrest and imprisonment' (p. 36). The Tory Blue Book against Communism 'provided useful information for the leaders of the Labour Party and the trade unions' (p. 35); and in 1926 'a Labour Party circular was published quoting from the

Government Blue Book', *i.e.*, from the Tory Government's official propaganda to make the case against Communism (p. 37). Black Circular methods to deprive trade unionists of their democratic rights in order to prevent Communist majorities are described with obvious approval. Thus for example the disruption of the historic London Trades Council by the General Council is justified on the basis of a distorted picture presenting it as losing members during the period of Communist active participation in the leadership ('had fallen so fully under party control that non-Communist unions had begun to disaffiliate from it', p. 158). In fact the membership rose during this period from 600,000 in 1945 to 850,000 in 1952 when the T.U.C. deregistered the historic London Trades Council (far older than the T.U.C.); not a single trade union disaffiliation took place until after the T.U.C. intervened, and then only under pressure from head offices; and the subsequent decline in membership followed the T.U.C. intervention and disruption. Similarly the extension of Communism among students and in the universities during the 'thirties is explained by the fact that at that time 'the University Labour Federation did not discriminate against Communists', *i.e.*, failed to operate the necessary Black Circular methods (p. 105).

*Fifth Fatal Flaw.* The fifth and most serious weakness of Mr. Pelling's book is the separation of the history of the Communist Party from the history of the British Labour Movement. The two are inseparable. The whole life and activity of the Communist Party is related to the struggle of the working class against capitalism, both in the industrial and the political fields; the fight for militant policies against reactionary policies in the labour movement; for democracy against fascism; for national liberation against colonialism; for peace against war; for socialism against the repudiation of socialism. To empty out in this way the content is to destroy the meaning: to present, in place of history, 'a tale, told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing'. It is as if a cinematograph film were to be made of a wrestling match, and then all the representation of one opponent blanked out from the film, so that by this means all the violent exertions, writhings and contortions of the single figure in a vacuum could be presented as something highly absurd and purposeless.

Of course Mr. Pelling, given his aim of proving a preconceived doctrine and prejudice, in place of following the path of history, could not do otherwise. For if he had given the true record of

the policies of capitalism, of Toryism and of the right wing Labour leadership at each stage during this period, and in this context set out alongside the policies of the Communist Party, it is inevitable that such a contrast would produce an inescapable conclusion in the reader's mind, however hostile the narrator, and demonstrate the repeated historical vindication, in the light of events, of the policies for which the Communist Party has fought during these forty years.

### *A Concluding Word*

These basic flaws, quite apart from any mistakes or inaccuracies of detail, disqualify Mr. Pelling from any claim to have written a 'Historical Profile' of the Communist Party. A serious history, or a first attempt at a serious history, is in course of preparation on behalf of the Communist Party. But a serious history will require more careful research and judgment of sources, more respect for facts, and above all more political understanding of the elementary realities of classes and the class struggle, as well as a little more sympathy and closeness to the spirit of militant workers and militant socialists than Mr. Pelling possesses.

For there is one thing which is most conspicuously missing in the narrative of Mr. Pelling, but which it would be vain to look for in him. That is an understanding of the honour of a Communist. When we consider the stature of a Tom Mann, a Gallacher or a Pollitt, and their record in the working-class movement, and compare it with the role of a MacDonald, a J. H. Thomas or a Gaitskell, we see not only the confrontation of two class outlooks, but of two conceptions of life. It is precisely because Communism represents that political force in Britain which can never be won over or turned aside by the ruling class, which can never be bought, intimidated, silenced or broken, that all the hatred of the ruling class, and all the arsenal of denunciation of the servants of capitalism, is most unceasingly and unswervingly directed against the Communist Party.

In his final conclusion Mr. Pelling confesses himself baffled by 'the problem of how it came to pass that a band of British citizens could sacrifice themselves so completely over a period of almost forty years to the service of a dictatorship in another country' (p. 191). Not the service of a foreign dictatorship, Mr. Pelling. In this to him insoluble problem his bankruptcy is revealed. Such service could never win the limitless loyalty, devotion, enthusiasm, and sacrifice which no other party or political organisation in

Britain has been able to show over these forty years. This limitless loyalty, devotion, enthusiasm and sacrifice is inspired, and can only be inspired, in Britain, as in all the countries of the world, in the service of the highest cause of all, the cause of human emancipation, of the world victory of communism.

The Twenty-Sixth Congress of the Communist Party at Easter has demonstrated that the Communist Party in this country, through the outcome of these forty years, despite all mistakes and weaknesses, despite all limitations, has established itself as a serious and organised political force. It has established itself as a party united in political outlook and understanding, and strongly based in the industrial working class and in every phase of the daily mass struggle. It has established itself as the only party with a programme for the fulfilment of socialism in the conditions of Britain and with a policy to tackle the problems of Britain in extreme imperialist decline. It is for all these reasons that to those with understanding of the deeper political forces of our time the Communist Party can already be confidently declared, visibly and demonstrably by all these signs and tests, and through the further advance which can now be achieved, the party of the future in Britain, as in the rest of the world.

*April 6, 1959.*

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**FEBRUARY:** *Election Prospects* (R.P.D.); *Suicide Club* (Ivor Montagu); *A Memoir of G. D. H. Cole* (R. Page Arnot); *Shop Stewards Today* (Bill Warman); *Convertibility and After* (J. R. Campbell); *Africa Awakened* (W. E. B. Du Bois); *Charles Darwin* (Clemens Dutt); *The Choice for the Sudan* (A. Masri); *Farewell to the Commune* (David Crook).

**MARCH:** *Thaw or War?* (R.P.D.); *The Tory Offensive: 1. What Does Mr. Gaitskell Offer?* (George Matthews); *2. The Miners Fight Back* (John Wood); *3. The Right to Work* (H. Howarth); *War Over Berlin?* (Ivor Montagu); *The Twenty-First Congress* (Andrew Rothstein); *I Was There* (Norman Temple). **BOOK REVIEWS:** *A Painter of Our Time* (John Berger); *Small Farm in the Steppe* (Valentin Katayev); Arnold Kettle, Rosemary Small.

**APRIL:** *Communism and the Left* (R.P.D.); *Macmillan's Visit* (Questor); *The Tory Offensive: How to Fight Back: 1. 'Claymore' Economics on the Railways* (Frank McKenna); *2. Force Out the Facts on Pit Closures* (George Alsop); *Nyasaland Massacre* (Hugo Rathbone); *The Dance of Freedom* ('Kenya Resident'); *Youth in Engineering* (John Foster); *Shorter Hours and the Crisis* (T. F. McWhinnie); *What Soviet People Read* (Judah Waten). **BOOK REVIEWS:** *The Brave New World* (Helen and Scott Nearing); *Jim Crow Guide to the U.S.A.* (Stetson Kennedy); *Anglo-Soviet Journal* (S.C.R.); *'Blow You Jack, We Were Right'* (B.O.A.C. Stewards); *History Unearthed* (Sir Leonard Woolley); William Gallacher, J.W., Peter Tempest, Wal Hannington, R. P. Arnot.

# A SIGNIFICANT CONGRESS

John Gollan

**T**HE 26th Congress of the Communist Party of Great Britain, which was held in London at Easter, was outstanding in many ways. The two main themes which dominated the reports and discussions were the need for unity in the Labour movement, and for the advance of the Communist Party as an essential part of the Labour movement.

The reception given by the Press to the Congress was significant. It centred on three points: the growth in the membership of the Communist Party; the call for unity in the Labour movement; and the fact that the Congress put forward serious proposals for the country and the working-class movement.

The increase in Party membership from 24,900 in February, 1958, to 26,749 at the time of the Congress showed the considerable advance made by the Party during the last twelve months. These have been months of great activity and struggle, with big public rallies advancing the Party's programme.

No one present could fail to be impressed by the composition and quality of the delegates. Congress showed that the Communist Party was bound up with the Labour movement by a thousand ties. Among the delegates were shop stewards, conveners, pit delegates, branch and district trade union leaders, leaders of co-operative societies and tenants' associations, etc. When they spoke it was the British working class speaking; they were an active, fighting, leading section of the British Labour movement. The discussion at the Congress was a record of struggle against the Tories and the employers—against the slump, pit closures and redundancy; for higher wages and improved social services, and for peace. But the Congress was more than this: it was a Congress which re-emphasised the basic purpose of the British working-class movement—political power and Socialism.

Key point of concern for the Congress was the solution to Britain's problems, economic, social and political. The policy adopted was no narrow internal platform, no exclusive concern of the Communist Party, but a broad, realistic and popular platform for the whole Labour movement. The Congress analysed Britain's economic situation, and its conclusion was:

Three things stand out in the present economic situation in Britain: first, the falling trend in exports due to the reduced purchasing power of

the raw material producing countries; second, the fall in fixed capital investment owing to the fact that the capacity built up in 1955-57 is surplus to requirements at the present level of the people's purchasing power; third, the resistance to increased wages, pensions and benefits, although prices (and especially rents) have continued to rise, and the purchasing power of the people is being kept down.

Here is the class analysis of Britain's economic position, one which cuts through the traditional capitalist presentation, whether that presentation comes from Tory or official Labour circles.

Heathcoat Amory's Election Budget, the concessions which mainly benefit the better-off and the monopolies, only emphasise Britain's economic difficulties. Mr. Gaitskell, following the Chancellor, rightly protested against the absence of any consideration for old age pensioners, but gave a general welcome to the Tory Budget, only complaining that these measures should have been taken long ago. This is characteristic of official Labour's policy of 'managed capitalism', as put forward in *Industry and Society* and *Plan for Progress*. It is an approach no different in essence from that of the Tories, one which does not probe the roots of the matter.

But the Communist Party Congress advanced a real programme against the slump—a programme on which the whole Labour movement should organise a united fight: against sackings, and for higher wages and salaries, pensions, allowances and benefits, in order to increase the purchasing power of the people; a forty-hour week throughout industry, and thirty-five hours for the miners; a big social building programme; the ending of restrictions on trade with the socialist countries, and low interest loans to former colonial countries; nationalisation—on a new basis—of the key industries; and a cut by half of military expenditure.

The Congress declared:

This is not a struggle to help capitalism to work, but to prevent capitalism putting the burdens of the slump on the shoulders of the workers. Economic crises are inherent in capitalism. The job for the working class is not to make 'sacrifices' to help capitalism, but to fight to defend and improve conditions now in spite of slumps. This means the mass struggle of a united working class against the employing classes for our anti-slump programme. It means an end to class-collaboration and to all talk about running capitalism better than the capitalists. *The Labour movement was not founded to run capitalism but to end it.*

What the Congress proposed was joint action by the trade union executives, backed by the Trades Union Congress and the Labour Party, for a nation-wide campaign to end the slump; that they should back the miners in their fight to prevent pit closures, and the fight of all workers who are threatened with redundancy; they

should organise common action now for increased wages and a shorter working week. Similarly, the Parliamentary Labour Party should apply the utmost pressure in Parliament on these lines, and massive Parliamentary lobbies should press the issues. The Communist Party, Congress declared, will do all in its power to help every section of the movement that comes into action; it will conduct a national crusade for action around its programme, and will find ways and means to generate and lead action to help the working class, seeking in every district and locality to get the widest united action.

The boldness and radical approach of the Congress on the home front was equalled by the serious and imaginative way in which it tackled foreign affairs. Here the keynote was: the cold war can be ended if all who want peace will come into the fight for it. The analysis of the international situation was summed up in the idea that the new balance of forces in the world, and the enormous new socialist advances that are planned, give us every confidence that world war can be abolished even before the whole world is socialist; but that the possibility of war is still acute, owing to the increasing desperation and adventurism in Western policy as the imperialists are driven further against the wall.

The change in the balance of world forces is vividly demonstrated by the vast socialist advances outlined in the 7-year Plan of the Soviet Union, in the stupendous leap forward by People's China, and in the assured progress of the other socialist countries; and by the strength and vigour of the national liberation movement in all subject countries.

Can anyone doubt that this is one of those really decisive stages in the development of world affairs? It is the background to the present disarray in the NATO Camp. What is involved here? It is a crisis in Western policy which is bankrupt. It is a situation in which Western policy could become more adventurous because it is untenable or the peace forces taking advantage of the situation impress their will on the Western Governments. The Macmillan visit to Moscow, Washington and Bonn, the growing stresses in West Germany shown in Adenauer's decision to relinquish the Chancellorship, the talk of the need for 'flexibility' is all evidence of this.

The central issue is the German problem, which the Communist Party Congress declared is the greatest source of danger, owing to the Anglo-American attitude and rejection up to now of all proposals for a solution. The Western Powers want to keep Berlin as

a military base and a centre of espionage a hundred miles within the German Democratic Republic; but the British people will never go to war for the right of Macmillan and Dulles to occupy Berlin. The Congress declared that what is needed, if there is a genuine desire to reach agreement, is: a conference at the highest level; no nuclear weapons for West Germany; recognition of the Government of the German Democratic Republic and of the fact that only the Germans can decide on the measures to bring about reunification; and readiness to discuss seriously the Soviet proposals on Berlin and on a German Peace Treaty.

International agreement, the Congress concluded, is the most important question, and it is also the issue on which the greatest number of people agree. The problem for the peace fight in Britain is to get this general agreement translated into action, and this is the responsibility of the peace movement and the Labour movement. But surely too the present stage of the struggle on peace shows the fatal position the Labour Party has got itself into, supporting NATO and a foreign policy whose mainspring is anti-communism? Within the Labour movement, there needs to be a still bigger effort to get the power of the movement used in support of agreed aims such as the stopping of tests, a Summit conference, and disengagement; but also to bring about a further change in Labour's policy. In advancing these propositions the Communist Party is conscious of its responsibility to put forward a basis for a programme which would rally all the popular forces.

At the centre of the deliberations of the Communist Party Congress was the need to change the political situation in Britain—to defeat the Tories in this election year and secure a Labour majority with some Communist M.P.s—and not only to win the election but to bring about a change in Labour's policy.

What is official Labour strategy, and what reasons are advanced in support of it?

The keynote of that strategy is: 'Don't scare off the floating voter with socialist solutions'. And while popular pressure in the movement has brought shifts in Labour foreign policy, support of NATO still remains its centre. This fundamentally opportunist approach has not brought results. Strong working-class leadership could build up the widest front of opposition to the Tories, but Labour's lack of fight arising from Labour's political position has failed to do so. Support for the cold war and defence of capitalism as the central features of Labour policy disrupted the wide support rallied by Labour in 1945, and created the conditions for the Tory

come-back. Between 1951 and 1955 the Labour leadership continued to support the wage freeze, social service stagnation, and the cold war. The new Labour policies express the furthest official swing to the right since the war. The essence of official Labour's policy, Congress declared, is now: so-called 'managed capitalism', that is *defence of the great monopolies*; and continued acceptance of the NATO alliance, whatever differences there may be between Labour and Tories on particular questions, that is, *defence of capitalism in international affairs*.

What did the Communist Party Congress put forward as the alternative policy and strategy for the Labour movement in this election year?

It declared that the political, economic and social factors making for a change are developing, and that what is needed is leadership, rousing the movement for united action in the struggle for work and wages, against rent increases and for peace, and for the election campaigning. Working in this way the Labour movement can not only rally existing support, but can influence those sections of workers who still vote Tory, rousing them to class consciousness and to a break with Toryism. Out of this can come a new radical advance of the Labour movement, drawing in sections of the middle class and the majority of the people, thus isolating the Tories and the monopolists. For what is involved is not only electoral victory, but a basic class fight before, during and after the election, to change the balance of class forces in Britain, which is essential not only to win immediate aims, but is decisive for any advance to socialism.

The programme put forward by the Communist Party Congress is a basis for class action against Tories and employers which can rally and unite all in the Labour movement who want a change. The fight of Communist Party candidates in seventeen constituencies will be the national focus of the struggle and of the alternative programme, and the Communist Party will make a bigger effort than ever to raise the Communist vote and secure the return of Communist M.P.s. Communist representation in Parliament is essential for the advance of the whole Labour movement. A group of Communist M.P.s alongside a Labour victory, would transform the whole position, strengthening the Left and progressive fight in Parliament and guaranteeing that the struggle for the alternative policy would be carried into the House.

*For the urgent need of the working class is not only a defeat of the Tories, but a basic new political advance in Britain. This is*

the most important conception advanced by the 26th Congress—the understanding that the political forces are maturing in the country, which given correct leadership, can break the near political deadlock of the past years. The monopolists can be increasingly isolated and a whole new phase of political advance opened up. This is what is at stake. This is the great political issue which concerned our Congress.

Here we were clear that the aims set by the Communist Party Congress cannot however be achieved unless all working-class organisations are brought into action against the Government—the trade unions, the Co-operatives, and all organisations of the Labour movement.

The importance of victory in the coming general election cannot be overstressed. The defeat of the Tories would reverberate throughout the world, making the whole situation more favourable for peace and fruitful Summit talks. Coming on the heels of the swing against de Gaulle in France, it would show that Western Europe was starting to go Left. We are well aware that the defeat of the Tories will not solve everything, and that a new policy for the Labour movement is needed. But the political action that is necessary to defeat the Tories can create a political mood and atmosphere in this country which can compel new advances in Labour's policy.

For the Communist Party, unity is not a tactical move but a deep-rooted principle. Unity is necessary not only for the immediate victory over the Tories, and in the conditions of struggle under a Labour Government, but for the political alliance of the working class and all progressive sections of the people that is necessary to achieve the British road to socialism. The long-term development to Socialism in Britain can only take place through the established organisations of the British working class, of which the Communist Party is a part. We see the advance to Socialism as a political process, with united action bringing all organisations of the British working class into action, the Left development of the British Labour movement, and the growth of the Communist Party as part and parcel of that development.

The Congress would not accept the position in the Labour movement after the Scarborough Conference of the Labour Party as final, ruling out any future policy changes. It does not correspond with the real relationship of forces in the Labour movement even at the present time. As the struggle against the Tories and the monopolies grows, so will the forces in the Labour movement

determined on a change. The Labour Party is a political coalition of Right and Left forces, those who support capitalism and those who are against it. The struggle between them is bound to go on until militant policies prevail in the Labour movement. The very fact our Congress argued, that present Labour policies do not solve the problems of the workers will cause the struggle for a new policy to rise afresh, whatever the attitude of those leaders claiming to be Left who have now made their peace with the Right. No serious Labour worker who has been through all the Left struggles of the past fourteen years can be satisfied with the present position. Is it inevitable in Britain that Left movements should reach a certain high stage of development and then succumb before the Right? Can any political conclusions be drawn for the future, because what advance can be made in the Labour movement without a new resurgence of the Left?

Here Congress presented an analysis which we think is worthy of the attention of all Labour workers.

The Bevanite movement broke up in confusion over policy on nationalisation and on nuclear weapons, rallying behind the right wing under the slogan of unity for the general election. This has happened time and again in the struggle of the Left. Before the war there was a wide measure of unity of the Left progressive forces, including the Communist Party, and this unity led to great anti-fascist mass actions and actions against unemployment. These were widely supported in the trade unions, and there was a great campaign against bans and proscriptions; and there was a growth of propaganda and educational work for socialism. It was this unity that made the movement in the 'thirties the power it was, despite all the attacks of the Right. But since the war attempts have been made to build the Left without the Communist Party, and without a clear alternative programme. That is why it was foredoomed to failure, and could not make any decisive change in the balance of forces in the Labour movement. Many of those on the Left still clung to NATO and the alliance with the United States against the socialist world. Above all, the collapse of the Left is due to trying to combine partially militant policies with anti-communism. A Left movement based on anti-communism is a fatal contradiction.

The Communist Party has proved its worth in the General Strike, the period of mass unemployment between the wars, the struggle against fascism at home and abroad, and in the fight for the second front during the war. And in more recent times too—in the fight

against the wage freeze, against the atom bomb and German re-armament; in the fight for socialist consciousness; providing militant leadership in the workshops and the trade unions, and striving at all times to end sectionalism and rally the united forces of the movement.

Why is it that while every other Left force has been dissipated and eventually disappeared as an organised body, the Communist Party has remained and developed? Because the working class found it indispensable—if it had not, the Communist Party would have disappeared from the scene long ago. The Communist Party is capable of giving leadership both in day-to-day struggles and in the fight for socialism—making unity and united action possible—because of its Marxist outlook, because it is composed of fearless fighters, principled in what they do, because it links the immediate struggle with the ultimate aims of the working class, and because it is the Party of class struggle, without which there can be no fundamental social change. And because such a Party is vital to the British working class, the Communist Party appeals to the whole of the Left in the Labour movement to get rid of the bans and proscriptions which hamper the development of united action.

What emerges from this Congress of the Communist Party therefore?

That the building of the Communist Party is of vital concern to the whole Labour movement. The Congress decided to continue the campaign to win new members for the Party, setting as the next step to reach the 34,000 membership of 1956, and to make a great drive to increase the circulation of the *Daily Worker*. These decisions were taken in no partisan spirit, but in the interests of the whole movement. It is only through the building of the Communist Party and increasing the circulation of the *Daily Worker* that it will be possible to realise the aims of unity and the alternative programme for the whole Labour movement.

The repulsing by the Communist Party's 25th Congress in 1957 of the revisionist attacks that arose inside the Party at that time, laid the basis for the advances of the 26th Congress. The carrying out of the programme and policy of the 26th Congress, and especially the rapid expansion of the Communist Party, is of the greatest significance for the socialist development of the British working class which the situation now demands.

# TIBETAN SERF-OWNERS' REBELLION

Alan Winnington

**‘UNLESS** there are serfs how can life go on? We cannot live without serfs.’ In these words the nub of the Tibetan question was frankly expressed to me in 1955 by Shinka Jigme Dorje, one of the highest monk aristocrats, member of six-man kashag, ‘cabinet’ of the group controlling the Dalai Lama. Shinka, otherwise known as Shashur, is now one of the rebel leaders, a Tibetan ‘freedom fighter’ in the words of the Western Press and Chiang Kai-shek.

Tibetan ‘freedom fighters’ who have fled to India are of course aristocrats. They represent a minority of the 170 or so noble families who rule the inarticulate serfs. The total of four million Tibetans who live in China, the one million in Tibet are mostly serfs, absolutely controlled by aristocrats. If the majority of aristocrats had supported the rebels, they could have ordered into action 150,000 monk commoners and their lay vassals. That the rebels could only muster 20,000 men, largely Khamba semi-professional fighters who never owed allegiance to Lhasa nobles and are looting Central Tibet, is alone adequate evidence that the rebels had little serious backing where it counted. They are the deepest dyed feudal group surrounding the Dalai Lama.

Since the British occupation of Lhasa under Younghusband in 1904, the yeast of the twentieth century entered Tibet and since 1951 it entered from the East—socialist yeast, causing ferment and polarisation amongst the nobility. Most articulate Tibetans—and that is few enough—want to find some way into the twentieth century. Nor is this surprising. A backward social system like that of Tibet is barely adequate to support the nobility in brocades, reasonable food, glass windows and feuds. It is considerably strange when outside influences make Rolex watches, Scotch whisky, cameras and radios *de rigeur* for anyone with family pretensions, and when motor cars become a possibility. There is no margin for further exploitation of these serfs: they live at the lowest possible level, so low that being able to survive at all is a tribute to their inbred mountain hardness. In some areas which I visited half the population were ‘black folk’—people without liege-lords, who had fled from their masters because the interests on their debts became more than their total ability to produce. Not

all the whips and dungeons, gougings and amputations of this mediæval society could wring more from such a backward mode of production. The development of industry alone could do that. But in the rigid terms of clerical and lay dictatorship even the wheel could only be used for spinning prayers and not for work.

Intelligent Tibetans were not unaware of the problem. Tibet had already reached a social impasse when China was liberated from Chiang Kai-shek in 1949. With the Communists in power it was a heart-rending choice for the aristocracy: whether to retain the centuries-old ties with China, knowing the Communists' predelection for the lowly; or whether to seek foreign help in separating Tibet from China, which could only end in Tibet becoming another Formosa, complete with F-86's and rocket bases deep in China's side. Why should Tibet, for all its isolation, fail to reflect the world struggle between capitalism and socialism, when even in Younghusband's day it reflected the rivalry between the British and Russian imperial powers?

The question was settled by the 1951 Agreement negotiated in Peking by the far-sighted lay aristocrat Ngabo Ngawang Jigme, member of the kashag, and one of its two members who refused to join the rebellion. There was little that the Western powers could do at that time about this Agreement, especially since most of them had recognised Tibet as part of China and the newly independent India took the position that relations between Peking and Lhasa were the internal affairs of China. But the rebel leaders are now boasting that the moment the Agreement was signed they started to prepare rebellion, according to the Indian press agency despatch from Kalimpong, India, on April 2. The rebels claim that they can fight for years in Tibet's mountains with American help via Pakistan and the Kuomintang force in North Burma, the agency said.

The 1951 Agreement reaffirmed that Tibet is part of China with the right to exercise national regional autonomy under the Central Government; that the central authorities would not make any changes in the political system, in the status of the Grand Lamas, the revenue of the monasteries or religious matters. It also stipulated that Tibetan leaders would themselves carry out reforms and that the Tibetan army would be reorganised into the Peoples' Liberation Army.

As I saw in Tibet, the central authorities scrupulously observed the letter and even more the spirit of the Agreement. Nevertheless it was not an agreement for the perpetuation of feudal rule. Its

aim, endorsed repeatedly by Tibetan leaders, was to enable Tibet to pass gradually from feudalism to the socialist mode of production when the situation and the people were ready. This is not as ridiculous as it sounds. Tibetan standards of living are so low that even rich Tibetans would scarcely rate as middle-class in the West. Very little investment would be needed to ensure that the nobles would suffer no loss from the gradual ending of serfdom. As to the younger aristocracy I found that they had little time for 'the Tibetan way of life' and would sooner be engineers, pilots or anything modern. Very roughly, the Central Government policy was to try to raise the general standards of life by loans, by selling goods at low prices, and buying Tibetan produce at favourable prices, by relief hospitals, and social services, while gradually winning over the aristocracy to co-operate in freeing the serfs and developing a better means of production. At no time was there any question of lowering the status of anyone.

In 1956 the present Foreign Minister, Chen Yi, told the Tibetan leaders in Lhasa that 'reforms in Tibet can only be carried out when Tibetan leaders and the people unanimously demand them and are determined on them. They can never be carried out by any other nationality'. He said that the status and living conditions of upper-class Tibetans, clerical and lay, must not be reduced and changes must only be for the better. 'This method is to the advantage of the aristocracy and of the monasteries and also of the people,' he said.

But the extreme feudalist group 'could not live without serfs'. And outside there were dollars to be had from people only too anxious to help the 'freedom fighters' and to turn Tibet into a new base for brinkmanship a thousand times more dangerous than Formosa. Whether the 'freedom fighters' see this or whether they see no further than the loss of their feudal privileges, still it remains the crux of the matter. Nor could socialist China wash its hands of the million or so Tibetan commoners who had no say in the matter.

No religious questions are involved at all. In other parts of China—Chinghai, Szechwan and Yennan—three million Tibetans live mainly under their own autonomous governments with complete freedom of religion and the same living Buddhas as they had ever had. Even after land-reform, co-operatives and now communes, there is no 'religious question', no loss of revenue to monasteries. Everyone is better off, as Chen Yi said.

# A Song for Socialists



COME hither, lads, and hearken, for a tale there is to tell  
Of the wonderful days a-coming when all shall be better than  
well.

And the tale shall be told of a country, a land in the midst of the sea,  
And folk shall call it England in the days that are to be.

There more than one in a thousand, in the days there are to come  
Shall have some hope of the morrow, some joy of the ancient home.

For then—laugh not, but listen to this strange tale of mine—  
All folk that are in England shall be better lodged than swine.

Then a man shall work and bethink him, and rejoice in the deeds of  
his hand,

Nor yet come home in the even too faint and weary to stand.

Men in that time a-coming shall work and have no fear  
For to-morrow's lack of earning and the hunger-wolf a-near.

I tell you this for a wonder, that no man shall be glad  
Of his fellow's fall and mishap to snatch at the work he had.

For that which the worker winneth shall then be his indeed,  
Nor shall half be reaped for nothing by him that sowed no seed.

O strange new wonderful justice! But for whom shall we gather  
the gain?

For ourselves and for each of our fellows, and no hand shall labour  
in vain.

Then all *mine* and all *thine* shall be *ours*, and no more shall any  
man crave  
For riches that serve for nothing but to fetter a friend for a slave.  
And what wealth, then, shall be left us when none shall gather gold  
To buy his friend in the market, and pinch and pine the sold?

Nay, what save the lovely city, and the little house on the hill,  
And the wastes and the woodland beauty, and the happy fields  
we till.

And the homes of ancient story, the tombs of the mighty dead,  
And the wise men seeking out marvels, and the poet's teeming head;  
And the painter's hand of wonder, and the marvellous fiddle-bow,  
And the banded choirs of music:—all those that do and know.

For all these shall be ours and all men's, nor shall any lack a share  
Of the toil and the gain of living in the days when the world grows  
fair.

Ah, such are the days that shall be! But what are the deeds of  
today.

In the days of the years we dwell in, that wear our lives away?

Why, then, and for what are we waiting? There are three words to  
speak,

WE WILL IT, and what is the foeman but the dream-strong wakened  
and weak?

O why and for what are we waiting, while our brothers droop and  
die,

And on every wind of the heavens a wasted life goes by?

How long shall they reproach us where crowd on crowd they dwell,  
Poor ghosts of the wicked city, the gold-crushed, hungry hell?

Through squalid life they laboured, in sordid grief they died,  
Those sons of a mighty mother, those props of England's pride.

They are gone; there is none can undo it, nor save our souls from  
the curse;

But many a million cometh, and shall they be better or worse?

It is WE must answer and hasten, and open wide the door

For the rich man's hurrying terror and the slow-foot hope of the  
poor.

Yea, the voiceless wrath of the wretched, and their unlearned dis-  
content,

We must give it voice and wisdom till the waiting tide be spent.

Come, then, since all things call us, the living and the dead,  
And o'er the weltering tangle a glimmering light is shed.

Come, then, let us cast off fooling, and put by ease and rest,  
For THE CAUSE alone is worthy till the good days bring the best.

Come, join in the only battle wherein no man can fail,  
Where whoso fadeth and dieth, yet his deed shall still prevail.

Ah! come, cast off all fooling, for this at least we know,

That the Dawn and the Day are coming, and forth the Banners go.

WILLIAM MORRIS



The Tibet rebellion which took eight years to prepare and two days to demonstrate its lack of real support, is a clear sign which way the wind is blowing on the high plateau. Naturally the Western Press had to turn the fiasco into a stick to beat China with. But basically the rebels isolated themselves and brought about their own destruction. It would have been better for all concerned if the desire of the majority for peaceful and gradual change had been pursued. But since all negatives have a positive, the rebellion will bring about more rapidly changes of advantage to Tibetan commoners in alliance with the less reactionary nobles. This is the one quite certain thing in a situation that is still fluid.

[*The above Peking cable came on April 7 from Alan Winnington whose book, Tibet: Record of Journey, is not only a most recent account by an English eye-witness but also the most authoritative book on the subject since Colonel Younghusband's looting raid over half-a-century ago.—Ed., L.M.*]

LABOUR MONTHLY

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS AGO

## THE INTERNAL SITUATION

Fifty-six years of Imperialist domination have reduced the workers and peasants of Cyprus to abject poverty and slavery. More than two-sevenths of the entire cultivated land belongs to the Church and the Monasteries. More than three-fourteenths are expropriated or mortgaged and only seven-fourteenths are owned by the peasants.

Cyprus is predominantly a peasant land. 75 per cent. of the entire population are peasants—small owners or renter (*i.e.*, peasants who rent land from the big kulak farmers or from the Church and cultivate it). The Church, the biggest feudal landlord, along with a dark phalanx of usurers and money-lenders, have crushed and ruined the peasants.

(From *Terror in Cyprus* by Evdoros Joannides, May, 1934.)

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# LANCASHIRE FIGHTS BACK

Harold Dickinson\*

*[In this article by Harold Dickinson and in the succeeding articles by engineer Ben Wilson, mineworker Joe Whelan, railwayman R. H. Smillie we continue the series (so much appreciated by many of our readers) showing what is being done to fight back against the Tory offensive.—Ed., L.M.]*

**L**ANCASHIRE textile workers realise more and more that their industry can die a lingering death if this Tory government remains in power. It is an urgent necessity to Lancashire that the government should not last any longer and should be forced into an election without delay.

Before the first world war, textile goods were one-third of England's manufactured exports. Now in 1959, imported cloth exceeds exported cloth in yardage. Between the wars, with the rise of Japan in a capitalist competitive world, and the development of textile industries in other countries, a great inroad was made into the export trading position of Lancashire. Cotton suffered unemployment in the 1930s and by the end of the second world war in 1945, the industry had shrunk to half its size. Nevertheless, a new impetus was then given to the trade. With such slogans as 'Britain's Bread hangs by Lancashire's Thread', a new look was given to cotton and operatives were encouraged to return in the confidence that cotton would never slump again, security and good wages would be the order of the day. We were to forget the old days and the 'dark satanic mills'.

By the last 1950s, this honeymoon period had ended, textile industries abroad had re-established themselves, and a repetition of the 1930s commenced, mill closures, short-time working and unemployment. During the 'boom' period, productivity incentive schemes had gradually spread with the introduction of the stop watch, work study and the slide rule chisellers and these in turn—because of multiple loom and spindle running—had increased the tempo and strain on the operatives. After twelve years of full employment, memories of the bad old days were a little blurred and the propaganda of the Welfare State had some effect. The workers were stunned, unemployment could not be with us again, 'the war had altered all that'.

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\*Mr. Dickinson, as many of our readers will know, is general secretary of the Burnley Weavers' Association.

But as mill after mill closed and most running mills worked intermittently, the workers saw that things were not as they should be. It did not appear to be so bad at first. Jobs were available in other trades and occupations for those sufficiently mobile, while even the middle-aged women could, with little difficulty, obtain work at other mills close by. But with the government's policy of industrial stagnation in a contracting capitalist world market and its effect on other industries, thus worsening trade conditions and making jobs scarce, the labour market has dried up and in many Lancashire towns, cotton textile workers have been 'signing on' during the past fifteen months. They have good reason to remember the Cohen Committee's Report and its pool of unemployment.

With Lancashire's tradition of struggle, we see ever growing signs of dissatisfaction and anger at the way things are going. As early as 1956, when the signs of unemployment were on the horizon, the textile unions in North-east Lancashire, centred around Nelson, demanded action against the government. In spite of higher trade union circles, a body of seventy representatives came to London and lobbied Parliament for a week to obtain assistance to the industry. Many local authorities, as well as local trade union officials from most of the North-east Lancashire towns were represented. They met seventeen Lancashire M.P.s in the House of Commons to state their case; they toured dockland with coaches decorated with slogans depicting the plight of Lancashire, such as 'Lancashire Today—You Tomorrow'. Over sixty M.P.s were lobbied during the week and no doubt the interviews bore fruit in subsequent debates in Parliament, especially by the Labour members. The delegation's visit coincided with the visit of Bulganin and Khrushchov to London and a letter was sent to the Board of Trade asking to meet a deputation with the object of increasing East-West trade.

With the success of the lobby, the organisations concerned next threw their weight into launching a monster petition throughout the whole of Lancashire with the object of reaching out to all sections of the population. The top leadership of the unions would not take any action because of their links with the Cotton Board which represents all sections of the industry and did not desire to embarrass the government. They considered that better results would accrue by making representation directly to the Prime Minister and the various ministries, and this they diligently did, making innumerable visits regarding the curtailment of cotton goods entering

the country. Finally, the petition was started in Nelson and spread to some thirty townships throughout the county. These petitions were presented to Parliament at the back end of last year and again representation was made by the leaders of the respective towns.

The widespread feeling against the government's policy and its attitude to cotton has been expressed even by their own supporters. For instance in the Rochdale by-election, the local Employers Association publicly stated that they would not support the Conservative candidate. The Barnoldswick Conservative Association declared that they had no confidence in the present government because of its attitude to the cotton industry. The mayors of Lancashire, by no means all Labour, have called numerous meetings to discuss the government's attitude to the plight of the cotton industry and the demand for new industries and have asked for representation before the Prime Minister to state their case.

With growing unemployment and mill after mill going out of business, and the government's economic policy retarding production, the whole trades council movement in Lancashire is moving into action. A call has gone forth from the Lancashire and Cheshire Federation of Trades Councils for a mass lobby on Parliament for April 21, 1959. When Mr. Ellis Smith, M.P., the President, can state that there are '189,000 men and women without jobs within a 50-mile radius of Manchester', it is clear that action to alleviate the unemployment position is urgently needed. This call is meeting with a growing response from all local trades councils in Lancashire and trade union executives, especially where unemployment in the respective industries is developing. The Legislative Council of the United Textile Factory Workers Association has for once given a lead to all textile unions by appointing four representatives on the lobby. This is an encouraging sign, for the leadership have not responded before to any action, which they felt would embarrass the other sections of the industry embraced by the Cotton Board.

By the time this article is published, the lobby will have been held with hundreds of responsible trade union representatives continuing the fight to make Lancashire and textiles a prosperous county and industry. It will help to create the necessary atmosphere in the constituencies to give encouragement to the activists in the labour movement to roll their sleeves up a little higher in the coming General Election to defeat the Tories in every seat in Lancashire.

The implementation of the *Plan for Cotton* will then be a stage nearer. The industry vitally needs the financial suggestions within that Plan, such as: a re-organisation commission; direct aid to re-equipment; taxation incentives to provide new capital; schemes of amalgamation and groupings; new buildings, machinery and working capital at favourable loan interests; a government imports commission. All these would help to bring back the stability to the cotton industry which is needed. This financial aid will show the need for further inroads into the vested interests of the combines and monopolies and will bring much nearer the demand for the nationalisation of the industry for its complete re-organisation and re-equipment with the object of fulfilling the needs of the workers in the industry and of the population at home, and of competing for the quality markets in the field of exports.

## NOT RECOGNISED!

Ben Wilson

**T**HIS is a record of a struggle against redundancy in a factory in the Greater London area. Like similar battles in other factories it typifies the readiness of the workers to fight for the maintenance of full employment, and the safeguarding of trade union organisation. There are 600 workers 'on the clock' at this factory; staff personnel brings the total to about 1,100. It was a family concern up to 1956 when it was taken over by one of the growing combines in the automation field. The take-over brought great expansion; new jobs appeared; the 'boffins' that accompany automation arrived on the scene and new production methods were put into operation. Then in 1958 the picture changed. The directors spoke of retreat and retrenchment. Then came the redundancy lists. The reaction of the workers was expressed in a mass meeting. They were not prepared to stand for hand-picked lists prepared by the management. They wanted time off for workers threatened with the sack to find new jobs, and compensation for workers with long service. They thought 'last in, first out' was a fair approach, and on this basis the shop stewards established a procedure for handling redundancy in negotiation with the management.

From an academic point of view the lists submitted by the management were fair enough. From a working-class standpoint they were not so good. No matter how fair the lists, workers were still going through the factory gate and the profit position of the company was being strengthened. Most of the workers were found new jobs before they left, but with the growing problems of industry and the rise of unemployment it was clear that as the last comers in their new firms their position was very insecure. Under these changes workers also change. The good trade unionist becomes more careful in his new job. The taming process, which is part of the employers' campaign, starts to operate.

Faced with a series of lists during 1958 the workers thought about all these things. And towards the end of the year when the management struck its most powerful blow and declared redundancy in a key shop the feelings in the factory jumped sharply forward. This list threatened the jobs of forty workers out of a shop only sixty strong. It came as a bolt from the blue. Apparently late one Friday a car had entered the factory gates, and a batch of top-notch production men, representing the 'higher' management, had calmly informed the local management that work would be restricted in this shop and they should go ahead with the sackings.

Although the full picture was still not clear the workers held a shop meeting and agreed unanimously to oppose this attack. Next day the shop stewards met and endorsed this decision and the fight had begun. When the shop stewards met the management they made it plain that they could not accept any redundancy lists; they proposed short-time working; the bringing of work from other factories; the dispersal of workers in other shops, and the ending of all overtime. Nothing doing; the management had its instructions and would go ahead with the sackings.

On a miserable foggy evening in early December after working hours nearly 400 attended a mass meeting, which endorsed the decision to contest the sackings, and agreed to set up a redundancy fund. By mid-December, when the first sackings were due, the strategy of the management was clear. They intended clearing the shop stewards out of the way, ignoring all past agreements, and maintaining in the shop only those workers least likely to fight for the maintenance of conditions. They had attempted to divide those to be made redundant by submitting two lists, those with only three years' service to be discharged mid-December, and paid till Christmas, and those with longer service to be given a month's notice and sacked in January. The reply of the workers was to strengthen

unity on the shop floor. A works conference, attended by the Divisional Organisers of the two main unions concerned, had rejected the management's case. This assisted in clearing the doubts in the minds of the weaker members in the shop. Next, the shop meeting rejected the offer of three weeks pay as compensation. They stood firm on the principle that no worker should leave until alternative work had been found. Faced with this united stand the management agreed that nobody would be sacked then, that they could work till Christmas and then be discharged . . . in legal parlance, a deferred sentence!

The fight for unity and for allies now opened out. Mass meetings in the factory decided on measures to strengthen the fight. Meetings were held in two of the other factories to win support for the impending dispute. Cash flowed into the redundancy fund. Delegations left the factory to see the M.P.s, and many workers realised for the first time that many M.P.s with Labour seats would not lift a finger to help workers fighting for their jobs. National newspapers were seen, from the *Stock Exchange Gazette* to the *Daily Worker*. All of them were very much interested, but only the *Daily Worker* printed the story of the fight going on in this factory. By Christmas Eve the position was clearer still. The workers in the key shop had agreed to strike if any one was sacked at Christmas, and only half an hour before a mass meeting called to endorse this recommendation, the management stepped back again and agreed not to operate any Christmas sackings, but to discharge everybody early in January . . . second deferred sentence! Still striving for a peaceful settlement the shop stewards recalled the works conference for the day before execution day. When the conference opened only eight names remained on the list. One was that of the works convener. Despite the fact that the organisers could show that a vacancy existed in the factory for the convener the management still refused to withdraw the list. The conference was abortive and the organisers agreed that it was now a question of using the organised strength of the factory. Despite every attempt to split their ranks the overwhelming majority of the factory stopped work.

Thought had to be given to the fact that no guarantee could be given of the attitude that the Executive of the main union concerned might take to a complete stoppage of work. Finally it was agreed that the key shop should cease work immediately to protect those left on the list, and that the rest of the factory would return to work, elect delegations of protest and bring new pressure

on the management. Whilst the workers who returned to work were creating a factory protest delegation of thirty leading workers, who laid siege to the management, those on strike set up organisation to conduct the struggle. Before Christmas sections covering publicity, the labour movement, and transport had existed and operated in the shop, so most of the preparatory work had been done. By mid-January every branch of the union in London and the provinces had been sent a statement of the case and collecting lists; every factory connected with the combine had been drawn in to assist. At this stage over £200 had been collected, including a donation from the union's District Committee of £20, and preparations for early help in many key factories was well advanced.

All this work, painstakingly planned and considered, every step examined and questioned before it was put forward, every pitfall probed and explored, had laid the basis for a settlement. Within three days work was resumed. Under the terms of settlement the convener was removed from the list, volunteers who did not want to return to the factory took the place of some of the workers on the list, and finally only two workers were without jobs, and these were guaranteed financial help until they found work.

A magnificent struggle? Undoubtedly. But not according to the right wing leaders of the union. Three weeks after the resumption of work the Executive agreed to meet the claims for dispute benefit, but not to accord the dispute 'official recognition'! When the branches catering for the factory raised the issue they were informed that the members on strike had 'broken the procedure agreement'. This procedure agreement was signed in 1922, long before the word redundancy was thought of in industrial affairs, and it lays down the reference of matters in dispute from one conference to another in an effort to avoid a dispute. Nice enough in theory. But in practice this process takes months to operate. Even a simpleton can appreciate that trade union organisation is being destroyed through 'redundancies': anybody who tries to argue that the workers should let themselves be sacked and then place their faith in some future conference to open the gates of the factory for them again, is arguing the management's case.

Yet that precisely is what the union's Executive says in this instance: You are a lot of naughty fellows breaking our delightful agreement. Why did not you let the management sack you and then we could have ridden up on our chargers like delivering knights and persuaded the management to take you back again? Curiously enough that was precisely what the management was asking

all the time. When at one stage the convener asked what the management thought would happen if the union organisers (at London level) refused to accept the company's arguments, the management promptly said: 'We presume that they will register a failure to agree and operate the procedure agreement'. So one finds the union's Executive and the company on one side united in the defence of an agreement that cannot possibly operate in issues of mass sackings; and on the other side the workers, learning and thinking in a new situation when capitalism is experiencing the beginnings of a serious crisis.

This aspect of the story is not peculiar to this particular struggle. The line-up against the workers is developing in almost every dispute in the engineering industry. Who will win in the long run? Undoubtedly the working class because it represents the interests of mankind. The basis for victory is always the same, a clear class approach and the building of unity.

## IS THERE A FUTURE IN MINING ?

Joe Whelan

**T**HE miners in Britain, like their brothers in all the capitalist countries, or what is supposed to be the 'free world', are in for a rough time. Tory policy in Britain, leads to insecurity, unemployment, the scrap heap, and the pawn shop.

With unemployment growing it reminds me of the time when my Dad's Sunday suit went into the pawn shop on a Monday and out on a Saturday. When you went to Mass on a Sunday you had to look decent. Dad took me to Mass one Sunday. We were very near the pulpit. He could not afford to redeem his suit that week, which was in for 5s.; so he went in his working clothes. He got odd jobs at the sewerage department for the Dublin Corporation. I said to Dad, 'Why is the priest all the time looking at us?' 'Oh, sure it must be your angel face me son', he replied, but he never went to Mass again without his best suit. If the capitalist class have their way in Britain, the pawn shops are going to do a flourishing trade. That is if Tory policy succeeds, and it is up to the workers, the miners in particular, to see that it does not.

The crisis in mining has come as a shock for some miners. 'Security for ever in mining', we were told, but like every other promise made by the capitalist class, it is just one more big lie. As if any working man could get security living under capitalism. We've got as much chance of security under capitalism as a pauper has of dying a millionaire. With coal stocks rising, now standing at thirty-seven and a half million tons; output per man on the increase; industrial demand for coal going down, and increased competition from oil, the future does not look too good for us miners. The question now is what are we, and the union, going to do about it? How have we allowed such a situation to arise?

I remember nine or ten years ago, a number of us advocating that we must stick to the five-day week. We fought for it long enough, let us keep it. We were told, 'All you want to do is pull down the Labour Government'. But what a difference today. If the miners were taken for a ride by the Labour Government, they will not be taken on the same bike by the Tories. The miners are beginning to see the light, and about time too.

Nationalisation of the mines also helped big business interests. Compensation from 1947 to 1958, £200,000,000, and no doubt most of that has been invested in oil to make more profit; cheap coal to capitalist industries, which is equal to us miners subsidising the profits of big business; the imposition of profits tax when we are supposed to be running at a loss; £70,000,000 paid for importing American coal and charged to the National Coal Board. A legal swindle, from our so-called 'betters'.

The cause of the crisis lies in the system itself. Millions of people in Britain, France, Belgium, Spain, Italy and West Germany suffer from the cold, from the want of a coal fire. Factories are closing down that produce clothing, footwear, furniture, bicycles, radio and television, and all kinds of household articles, even food itself. All because the wages, or purchasing power of millions of people are not enough to buy back all that we produce. That is one reason for the crisis. But it must be understood that capitalism never intended to satisfy the needs of man. Its whole aim and objective is to make profit out of you and me. And only the maximum will satisfy the greed of the boss class.

In the Nottinghamshire coalfield, output per man shift is breaking all records. Stocks at present in the area are 6,000,000 tons. The target for the East Midlands coalfield in 1959 is 45,000,000 tons, but at the present rate of production, this will be exceeded by

2,000,000 tons. The Notts miners know what to expect in this situation, the same scrap heap and dole queue as for our brothers in Wales and Scotland. But militancy is rising. At a recent branch meeting in the local cinema with approximately 250 members present, we voted unanimously to ban all coal production which was taking place in overtime working; and we are insisting that the whole area do the same. This was an expression of solidarity and unity with Wales and Scotland and also a safeguard against pit closures in the Notts area.

In order to be able to fight effectively against the crisis we miners must understand and expose the capitalist system that caused it. All miners must see the need to put up a stronger fight, even if it means strike action to get a better share of the wealth we produce. Our demands for a seven-hour day underground, an eight-hour day for surface workers, and three weeks holiday with pay can well be afforded, and Sir James Bowman's refusal must be taken as a challenge to the rank and file to put pressure on our leadership to get our just demands. Talking will not take the place of action and resolutions will not take the place of achievements. If some of our leaders were half as good at fighting the N.C.B. as they are at being anti-communist, we would have a good leadership.

The capitalists will use every trick in the bag to curb the power of the workers in the struggle. Tory lawyers are working overtime to shackle the unions, to make our organisations 'loyal devoted servants' to the system. Big capital and finance, are doing their damndest in every way, through press, pulpit, radio and television to disarm and divide the workers, but despite all their efforts they cannot stop the onward march. Is there a future for us miners? The answer is yes. We must not accept this decaying capitalist system deciding our destiny. We do not want unemployment, the dole, the pawn office, and insecurity. If the Russian miners can get a six-hour shift without loss of pay, we can do the same. Pensions at 55, full pay when off work through sickness or injury; the same will do for us. Our cause is bound to triumph. The future belongs to shorter working hours, better wages, security, peace and socialism. How soon we achieve it, depends on how much we want it, and how much we do to get it.

# CRISIS IN TRANSPORT

R. H. Smillie

*[We are pleased to print this article by one of our regular readers who is both a keen trade unionist and an active member of the Labour Party. As many readers will know, he is a grandson of the famous miners' leader, Robert Smillie.—Ed., L.M.]*

**I**N the April issue of *Labour Monthly* we read about 'Claymore Economics on the Railways'. How right was the author (F. McKenna) in his analysis of developments recently.

What has caused much of this and what is to be done in the future? That is the question which faces transport workers today. A policy of expansion is needed instead of cuts and to carry this out a new outlook is long overdue regarding Railway finance.

If the Labour Government is returned they must be reminded of the result from the Cameron Court of Inquiry when it stated that the nation must subsidise the industry. The big mistake that was made was the promise that such a huge sum of money should be paid out every year to ex-shareholders. The industry was known to everybody to be in a deplorable condition and in view of this the very minimum amount should have been agreed to.

Two courses are open here for consideration.

(1) The Labour Government should use a state subsidy equal to the amount the ex-shareholders were promised and pay it off to them per year, or (2) alter the agreement of the Act and suspend or greatly reduce the amount of compensation until the industry is on a better footing, when it can then be cleared off.

We must remember that if the railway industry had still been in private hands, the ex-shareholders would have had their interests cut anyway. Railwaymen must not stand by and see their conditions deteriorate, have their fellow workers sacked, whilst the British Transport Commission pursues 'economies' and at the same time forks out huge sums of money to people who are mostly well outside the industry.

Renationalisation of the British Road Services section is another important step and should be carried out without any compensation this time.

Private contractors running freight by road and doing so in many instances by getting their workers to travel excessive distances and involving longer hours, have taken a great deal of traffic away from the railways and so provided profit for themselves. Our argument

is that *all* transport should be unified so that it becomes efficient to the whole nation.

The British Road Services made a net profit in 1953 (before its break-up) of £8,871,943. Now note the statistics of the B.T.C. issued in April, 1959, of the drop in freight receipts. The first 12 weeks of 1959 were £86,994,000, almost £7 millions less than £93,680,000 in the same period last year. Only the *profitable* section of transport was de-nationalised by the Tories, bringing cash to their friends, leaving the rest of the industry to suffer and then saying that it is 'uneconomic'!

These points which are being stressed are not to be taken as an argument for cuts among the British Road Services workers in favour of railwaymen but to show how the present system of freight haulage is wasteful and should be changed to ensure proper co-ordination between road and rail so as to be beneficial both to worker and country.

One of the most recent problems facing railwaymen is created by the latest proposals which have been put forward by the British Transport Commission management in the Scottish Region of British Railways. An attempt is being made to 'run on the cheap' services in the summer. Through the Consultation Machinery between the National Union of Railwaymen and themselves they have more or less dictated to the Union what is going to be done. Here is an outline of the B.T.C. attitude. They say that due to the serious financial position in the Scottish Region, certain changes in the workings of the staff should take place. It is claimed that there will be insufficient staff both to cope with the summer traffic and to allow for men taking annual leave. Hence these proposals should come into force, as follows:

(1) In a station normally manned by two men, when one man takes his holidays, the other should cover up for him.

(2) Close certain stations.

(3) Convert a station to an unstaffed halt.

(4) Station Masters and Clerks to cope with such extra work as the handling of parcels, etc.

(5) Passenger Guards to issue and collect tickets and deal with unaided trains.

(6) If a signal box is adjacent to the station the signaller to cover up by attending trains, lighting and extinguishing lamps.

(7) A lengthman in the Civil Engineer's Department to cover half his shift doing lengthman duties then the remainder on station porters' duties.

(8) A man on night duty at a goods depot to do additional work in the form of station duties in the early morning.

If these proposals are allowed to be put into practice it would be fatal to the standard of the conditions of service and it is feared by many railwaymen that they may develop into a permanent arrangement. So much for the offensive of the B.T.C. It should be noted however that for some time now *all* recruitment has been stopped to the industry and likely to remain so.

The N.U.R. opposes these plans because it feels that the lines of demarcation between grades should not be broken. The Executive Committee of the union has now considered the matter and said that unless the proposals are withdrawn immediately, it will 'take any measures it deems necessary to protect its members'.

Before this statement was issued by the Executive Committee the West of Scotland District Council declared that they would bring their members out on strike. An assurance of support was given also by the East of Scotland District Council. So feeling is running high in this Region and certain questions are being asked by the workers. First, is this move another example of Tory Government pressure behind B.T.C. policy? Second, the Scottish Region has been singled out for attack so far—why? Third, do they want to create divisions in the ranks? Fourth, why not recruit more men to the job? Fifth, is the unemployment figure to be maintained?

But what is the lesson of all this to the railway workers? The answer is simple. They must secure 100 per cent Trade Union membership and be united in action. Unfortunately this is not the case. Not only has the B.T.C. refused to co-operate in the forming of compulsory T.U. membership (the reason is obvious), but the men are not in a position to demand it due to the fact that they are divided, being organised in three different unions (Transport Salaried Staffs' Association, Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen and National Union of Railwaymen). Surely all left-wing thinkers must see that the time is long overdue for *all* railwaymen to be under one union or, the three to be merged into a Federation. Only under these circumstances will lie *real* strength for securing benefit to all and to challenge this crisis in transport.

## HEAD TO TOES

'Good ideas are only good if they pass down to your feet.'

*With which words of wisdom, a star Labour Monthly seller urges expenditure of greater energy by us all in Socialist propaganda.*

*One London reader sets a very good example of fruitful footwork with regular visits placing L.M.s with newsagents, selling 15 in February and 11 in March (decline due to sudden removal of a good customer). Belfast efforts have pushed up an order from 18 to 25. A Conway reader has placed a copy in a local library and a Mancunian has taken specimen copies to distribute and follow up.*

*Our own efforts, by way of the postmen's feet, have also proved profitable. Already early in the month, we have a good response to letters sent about the April number, including orders from Durham miners' lodges; a railwayman; an A.E.U. District Committee in Surrey and a Scottish miners' district committee, promising promotion of further sales if our magazine is found to be 'interesting or educational'.*

*Nothing but the best being good enough for the working class, we cannot be satisfied with results so far achieved in our campaign. We are still not selling enough copies of Labour Monthly. We draw attention to Harold Dickinson's article in the current number and ask for action by our supporters to sell more to textile workers. Ben Wilson's article on a wonderful fight against redundancy is just the thing to get into the hands of engineering workers to help bring 'confusion to our enemies'. Alan Winnington's facts on Tibet provide a powerful antidote to the poisonous nonsense being spread about that country, including to our disgust, in B.B.C. Children's Hour newsreel. A suggestion here would be to approach Tribune readers, since their writer on the subject seems undetermined as yet which leg to stand on. John Gollan's article, following the Communist congress, surely cries aloud for special sales efforts directed to active Labour workers.*

*We urgently need more readers to volunteer to help our campaign in these ways; to offer to sell L.M. at events up and down the country and to use some of the good examples given above.*

*Let your good ideas first reach your hand. Fill in the form on the back page of the cover. Send it to us, and then your feet can go into action. Ask for any help you need, arrangements for supplies on credit; specimen copies or what have you. We will do everything we can to assist.*

# TRADE UNIONS UNDER FIRE

O. H. Parsons

**T**HE Tory attack on the trade union movement is increasing in intensity as the signs accumulate that economic depression is imminent. The rich dare not face a slump with the unions strong and powerful. They are turning to changes in the law, in the hope of sapping their strength before the coming clash.

In this article only the more moderate Butler-MacLeod Tory propagandists' arguments are considered; their demands will represent the *minimum* proposals we can expect if a Tory Government is returned to power. The proposals considered are those in the *Economist* early in 1958; in a booklet, *A Giant's Strength* published by the Inns of Court Conservative Association in mid-1958; and in the *Sunday Times* in March, 1959.

They have a common approach. Trade unionists, they say, are a fine body of men; they are responsible, decent, reliable; the rank and file is 'the sleepest and least militant part of the movement';<sup>(1)</sup> their leaders 'are neither better nor worse than the leaders of industry or politics. But when these latter fail us we can usually take some action as a community'.<sup>(2)</sup> Amidst all this, the real spleen nonetheless emerges; the union's 'powerful, decentralised, . . . vested interest' was last paralleled in 'the French nobility under the *ancien régime*';<sup>(3)</sup> they are 'the most powerful single organisation which has ever existed in these islands, with the possible exception of the medieval church';<sup>(4)</sup> with glee, 'their apparent strength is quite inadequately backed with the financial sinews of solidarity . . . its real strength in a tussle, when employment may become less full, may turn out to be surprisingly weak'.<sup>(5)</sup> The lawyers confine themselves to providing safeguards against the 'ignorant', 'blind', 'unreasonable', 'irresponsible', and 'lethargic' union leaders.

The right to strike was first conceded by the Conspiracy and Protection of Property Act, 1875, which removed strike action from its previous Common Law category of criminal conspiracy. In 1901 the Taff Vale case was decided. Employers sued the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants (the forerunner of the National Union of Railwayworkers) for damage caused to them through a strike called by the Society and they succeeded in their claim. This

(1) *Economist*, February 15, 1958.

(2) *Sunday Times*, March 8, 1959; shades of Bank Rate leak!

(3) *Economist*, February 2, 1958.

(4) *Sunday Times*, March 8, 1959.

(5) *Economist*, February 8, 1958.

case decided that though not criminally illegal a strike was none the less a civil wrong and that unions could be sued and made liable to pay crippling damages for inducing their members to commit the breach of contract involved in going on strike. This was remedied by the Trade Union Act of 1906 which protected unions funds from such claims arising out of an industrial dispute. It is this legislation, manifestly the lynchpin of a free trade union movement, which is currently under attack. The Tory lawyers are the most specific, and in *A Giant's Strength* they propose:

1. That a union calling an official strike shall lose the protection of the 1906 Act unless before doing so it (a) submits its case to an 'independent tribunal' and (b) waits for fourteen days after its report to enable 'a well-informed public opinion' to come into being. It is only necessary to point out the effect of this delay on redundancy and victimisation issues, amongst others, to see how it would work.

2. That the same procedure must be followed in sympathetic strikes, thereby through the inevitable delay rendering them useless in their object.

3. That 'political strikes' are to be made criminally and civilly illegal, thus rendering those who call them liable to prison sentences as well as exposing the union funds to civil actions. Such strikes are defined as 'a strike the dominant purpose of which is to coerce a government (or to arrogate some function of government, such as the withdrawal or promotion of legislation or the control or migration of trade)'. The effect of this proposal would be to make criminally and civilly illegal every strike in a nationalised industry.

4. That unofficial strikes be made both criminally and civilly illegal. This proposal is part and parcel of the attack on shop stewards and what is called 'decentralisation', which is common to all the reformers under review.

The attack on shop stewards and 'decentralisation' is most revealingly made in the *Economist* (February 2, 1958). Shop stewards, it says, 'make a good thing for themselves in terms of power over their fellows . . . (and) in terms of not having to do hard work, because they know that timid employers will not dare to sack them. . . . (They) make a good thing in terms of creature comforts, if not of hard cash' by stealing lottery or football pool money collected by their mates; they run 'a plain and powerful racket'. In addition, they 'rigidly enforce the principle of the closed shop', send blacklegs to Coventry, a lot of them are Communists

and, their most heinous offence of all, 'they also know where to exert power'.<sup>(6)</sup>

Starting from hypotheses of this type it is scarcely surprising that some pretty weird proposals emerge; like weeds from a dung-hill.

Apart from making unofficial strikes illegal, backed with penal and civil sanctions against shop stewards and local officials who call them, the main proposal is for greater central control of the unions and for intervention of outside bodies in union affairs. Thus, the *Economist* (February 22, 1958) proposes that only unions registered with the Registrar of Friendly Societies should enjoy any rights under the Trade Union Acts <sup>(7)</sup> and that the Registrar 'should certainly have the power to investigate cases where the management of local union affairs does not seem to be in accordance with what registered union rules would or *could* state' (my italics; whatever does this mean?) with power to deregister a union which 'does not bring a locally offending clique to order'.\* In addition, backed by the same sanction, the Registrar should have 'more power of scrutiny of the ballots' in union elections, the 'ideal solution' being for him 'to take over the role of returning officer directly'; the ultimate solution, if all this does not work, would no doubt be for the Registrar to do the voting as well!

'Victimisation' and 'local bullying' by shop stewards and local officials would be remedied by making them civilly liable for damage caused to blacklegs unless they could show 'that they were acting on their own head office's behalf'. Political intervention by outsiders reaches its extreme when the question of expulsion from a union is considered. This must be authorised only by 'the central authority of a union'. Then the Registrar, apart from ordinary appeals inside the union, should insist that the rules provide for an expelled member's appeal to an outside body, 'an impartial tribunal'.<sup>(8)</sup> From this body a further appeal should be made to, of all people, the Commercial Court of the High Court (it has been dead for years), and preferential treatment over and above that afforded to ordinary litigants, as to a speedy hearing and costs, should be granted to the appellant. Finally, even if the Court, after all this, decides that the expulsion is legal, it shall have 'discretion

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\*Compulsory registration coupled with the power widely used to hamstring all active or politically 'undesirable' unions has long been a recognised anti-trade union device in the Colonies and overseas dependencies. It is significant that in the trade union field, as in others, British reaction is seeking to employ against the Movement at home the weapons they have tried and tested on their colonial workers.

(6) *Sunday Times*, March 15, 1959.

(7) The *Sunday Times* agrees, March 22, 1959.

(8) The lawyers also favour this.

to say that the expulsion should not take effect' if, in its view, the damage to the man resulting from his expulsion outweighs the damage to the union by his staying in.<sup>(9)</sup>

The lawyers are particularly vocal on the question of restrictive practices.

We recommend that where it is alleged that a restrictive practice is being operated by workmen the question should be referred to a court to decide whether such restrictive practice is justified in the public interest. The burden of satisfying the Court that it is in the public interest should lie upon the workmen, or union, operating it. We see no reason why the existing Restrictive Practices Court, with suitable assessors, should not carry out this task.

The important words are 'operated by workmen'. Nothing is suggested to deal with the restriction to production caused by bank rate increases, monopoly, mass unemployment and the other delights of a 'free' capitalist economy.

On inter-union demarcation, the *Sunday Times* (March 8, 1959) urges that strikes resulting from such issues should be made criminally and civilly illegal. The lawyers recommend that the unions should agree to be bound by the decisions of the Trades Union Congress Disputes Committee where such problems arise.

On the other hand, it seems to be agreed by these gentlemen that what they call 'increased competition' amongst unions would be a good thing. Quite how they think that this will reduce demarcation and inter-union trouble they do not make clear. Perhaps they do not care; divide and rule failed in Ireland, India and Cyprus, but never mind, perhaps they think it will work at home. The lawyers deprecate the 'long and uphill struggle' faced by a "'splinter" union' in securing recognition from employers and that such a 'breakaway union . . . will not normally have the benefit of the practical assistance that an employer can give to help it organise its affairs'. It is in the interest of workers that 'such a splinter union should be able properly to play its part' and provide the 'stimulus of competition. . . . The nationalised industries should take the lead in this'. Similarly, the *Economist* (February 22, 1958) would like 'greater competition for membership between unions . . . active poaching by trade unions would not be a bad thing'. The Registrar 'should have some weapons to protect the little fellows from big brother oppression' by using the threat of de-registration.

In the name of progress these reformers seek to destroy the right to strike and put the clock back eighty years. In the name of

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(9) *Economist*, February 2, 1958.

freedom, they seek to grant a charter to blacklegs and to refuse the right of trade unionists not to work with nons. In the name of democracy, they seek to allow Civil Servants, lawyers and judges to control internal union affairs and crucially weaken local union autonomy and initiative. In the name of competition they seek to encourage splinter company unions to undermine the power of the established movement. And these, it must be repeated, are the demands not of the lunatic fringe and the backwoodsmen but of the moderate wing of the Tory Party.

The movement is about to face a more dangerous attack on its rights, and on its ability to defend its members in the coming slump, than at any time since 1927. This attack cannot be met with lethargy, complaisance or appeasement. It can only be met by the movement, here and now, before the campaign gathers more momentum, making it starkly clear that it will not tolerate interference in any form with the legal rights which our fathers won through centuries of struggle and that it will fight for its rights every inch of the way and with every weapon in its power.

## THE ARTIST'S ONE WORLD

John Berger

**T**HIS important book\* is a difficult one to review and I am not sure that I can do it justice. It is difficult because its value depends upon the quantity and intricacy of the evidence which Alick West has gathered to support his main thesis: evidence, in other words, which cannot be adequately described in a short note like this. Alick West is a Marxist literary critic who surely needs no introduction: there are very few scholars of his calibre and vision working in this country—and incidentally this book might well be translated abroad because there can only be a few scholars anywhere with his intimate knowledge and love of English literature.

His thesis is that in any society, just because it is a human society, there is unity. This may be a unity of conflict in so far as the interests of different classes are opposed. But nevertheless there is a unity because all men are human, because the different sections of society constantly interact upon one another, because in every

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\*'Mountain in the Sunlight', by Alick West. Lawrence & Wishart. 25s. 208 pp.

society men must co-operate, and because always there are those who strive together to turn this organic unity into a full, conscious unity of equality and fraternity. He believes that the artist works from an awareness of this basic unity, and that, if he lives during a time of revolution, this awareness will force him to point the way towards destroying those economic and social contradictions which limit the unity of his society to one of conflict. He illustrates his thesis by analysing the works of Bunyan, Defoe, Wilde, Pater, J. B. Priestley and Jack Lindsay. And in each of his studies—except that devoted to Jack Lindsay who is a trained Marxist and so in a different category—in each he shows how this process is only partly conscious. The artist knows that he wants a world of greater order and unity. Bunyan writes of the Celestial City. Robinson Crusoe escapes from bourgeois society to an island where labour is free from commodity values. Walter Pater's *Marius, the Epicurean*, finally abandons his aestheticism based on privilege and joins the early revolutionary Christians. Oscar Wilde (and this, in my opinion, is Alick West's most illuminating essay for it completely reverses the usual assessment of Wilde as a decadent) can write that all revolutions in both art and politics have but one origin: 'a desire on the part of man for a nobler form of life, for a freer method and opportunity of expression'. J. B. Priestley has said: 'Nothing matters but that the people, not a privileged few individuals, but the people, should be freely functioning, zestful, unencumbered, thoroughly alive, and know something, as they pass through this strange haunted world, of truth, beauty and love'.

Knowing, however, that one wants a more human world is not the same thing as knowing how to get there. And this is where the contradictions arise and where the artist becomes less conscious of the implications of his work. Bunyan, being a Baptist, placed his Celestial City in heaven. Defoe believed that trade, as created by the new powers of capitalism, could lead to an unending progress. Wilde found comfort in a kind of sentimental aesthetic Christianity. Yet at the same time each of these writers expressed something far broader than their own historically and socially limited solutions: each pointed out inconvenient truths: inconvenient to their societies—each was imprisoned—and even inconvenient to their own arguments. Bunyan used an allegory form which firmly placed the struggle for 'righteousness' in the everyday world. Defoe demonstrated that capitalist trade in fact bred a constant fear of other men. Wilde testified in every other line, if not in every line, to the necessity of a political revolution. Thus each essay in this book

encourages and strengthens the conviction that an artist's imaginations can serve the political and therefore the human progress of men as steadfastly as can consistent political wisdom. This does not of course happen inevitably. Lesser artists can become the victims of their false ideology—as Priestley has become the victim of his petty bourgeois fear of the crowd, unless it is a passive one at a football match. Nor does Marxism offer a ready-made solution. West suggests that Jack Lindsay, despite his courage, has sometimes substituted schematic political thinking for creative imagination.

What I think this book is saying is that the artist's imagination has a logic of its own. Not because the artist is autonomous and not of course because his imagination has any kind of supernatural power: but because it is the faculty of man which responds most sensitively to unity. The artist works because he is aware of the unity of his society, even if this is a unity of conflict. It is this which forces him to believe that his own or other men's reactions can be made relevant for thousands of other people. It is this which forces him to connect, so that he is always taking more than a single view. It is this which allows him to believe that innovations in art can express or prepare for revolutionary innovations in social life. Above all, it is this which compels him to tell the truth, because he senses that this unity is something more profound than any set of opinions—he does not have to be a Marxist to sense that the superstructure is dependent on deeper relationships. And by telling the truth, he exposes the conflicts within the present unity of his society thus making it easier to advance to a more rational unity.

This is a book from which I myself have learnt and which I strongly recommend. Possibly a little of the evidence in each essay is repetitive, and possibly some of the theoretical conclusions might have been hammered home more. But this is a question of temperament. Alick West is a scholar. His research and care have now made it possible for others to stand on his shoulders and shout.

## BOOK

### Peoples' Capitalism.

J. M. Budish.

In collaboration with *Labor Research Association. International Publishers, N.Y.*

64 pp. 50 c.

A GREAT effort is now being made to persuade the American people that capitalism in their country has been transformed into something utterly different from what it was in Marx's time. It is claimed that 'almost everybody is a capitalist' in this novel form of society, aptly named 'peoples' capitalism'. This is just plain nonsense, as is made clear in this admirable booklet which is packed with information on the latest developments in American monopoly capitalism. In spite of all the schemes for spreading share ownership among the employees of the largest corporations, some 90 per cent of the American people own no stock at all and the share-holdings

of the great majority of the other 10 per cent are limited to an insignificant number of shares.

Peoples' capitalism is also credited with 'the miracle of economic multiplication'. But the author shows that the spread of monopoly through the American economy has had a powerful effect in slowing down its rate of growth. In the earlier competitive period of 1867-1907 the average annual rate of growth was 5.2 per cent. In the latest period of 1928-55 the rate had fallen by nearly a third to 3.6 per cent. The Soviet economy has expanded at a rate between two and three times faster than the fastest rate ever achieved in America. In making this comparison the author makes very effective use of the official statistics prepared for the Joint Economic Committee of the U.S. Congress which investigated the comparative rates of growth of America and the Soviet Union in 1955.

JAMES HARVEY.

## PUBLICATIONS RECEIVED

### BOOKS

- Capitalism, Yesterday and Today, Maurice Dobb. Lawrence & Wishart. 63 pp. 2s. 6d.  
 Toward A Socialist America: A Symposium of Essays edited by Helen Alfred. Peace Publications. 224 pp. \$3.50.  
 The U.S.S.R. 100 Questions Answered. Soviet Booklet No. 40. Soviet News. 198 pp. 1s. 6d.  
 Schoolmaster in Huan-Chih. Yeh Sheng-tao. Foreign Languages Press, Peking. Translated by A. C. Barnes. 384 pp.  
 By Road to Moscow and Yalta. Robert Bell. Alvin Redman. 296 pp. 15s.  
 Some Economic Illusions in the Labour Movement. J. R. Campbell. Lawrence & Wishart. 68 pp. 2s. 6d.  
 We Accuse (800 bloodstained nazi judges uphold the Adenauer régime). Committee for German Unity, Berlin. 182 pp.  
 Revolution in a Chinese Village. David and Isabel Crook. Routledge & Kegan Paul. 188 pp. 21s.  
 Ballet School of the Bolshoi Theatre. Y. Bocharnikova and M. Gabovich. Foreign Languages Publishing House, Moscow. 94 pp. 3s. 6d.  
 The Soviet School of Chess. A Kotov and M. Yudovich. Foreign Languages Publishing House (Central Books). 390 pp. 13s. 6d.  
 Eisenstein: Notes of a Film Director. S. Eisenstein. Lawrence & Wishart. 208 pp. 18s.  
 The Crowd in the French Revolution. George Rudé. Oxford University Press. 268 pp. 35s.

CORRECTION.—"Marx On Lincoln" on page 192 of the April *Labour Monthly*, last line but one delete "to" and substitute "by".

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(Continued from page ii of covers)

intellect, so as to acquire the knowledge and skill requisite for the rapid progress of invention'. When this was ignored, they chose four firms to petition: one of these, Messrs. Trollope, dismissed a man presenting the memorial, and his workmates stopped work. The master builders dubbed their strike 'aggression', and declared a lockout, 'in justice to the rights and independence of the working classes', until 'peaceable and well-disposed workmen' should sign a Document agreeing not to 'become a member of, or support' a trade union. This was in imitation of the scheme first tried out by Lancashire and Cheshire master builders, a quarter of a century before. So 24,000 London building trade workers, many Irishmen forced to leave their country by starvation, were locked out. Their solidarity was remarkable. A Government official described it as 'a state of open war', adding: 'The wives evidently thought their husbands in the right and suffered with them the pangs of hunger. . . . This distress produced ultimately a sensible effect on the mortality of the men and their wives. As long as there was bread, the poor children apparently had it; until weakened, cold, ill-clad, they at last died in unusual numbers as the severe weather came on'. All indus-

trial areas formed committees to support the builders, and the solidarity fund amounted to the then vast sum of £23,000. For three weeks running the engineers contributed no less than £1,000, remembering their own struggle of seven years before against a similar document (which I quoted in April, 1957). This, say the Webbs, was 'long recalled with emotion' by the builders: the same feelings as those aroused in the Chinese people by British solidarity with them. The Lock-out led directly to the founding of the London Trades Council and stimulated the growth of councils elsewhere; for the lesson was learned that each section needs the support of the whole class when faced with onslaught by the class enemy. And what more apt message for this May Day, 1959? Especially for the pages of *Labour Monthly*, which has campaigned for unity against sectionalism in the working class ever since our first number, July, 1921. Note, for example, articles in this issue on how to fight back against the Tory offensive. This battle for class loyalty to class ideas and a class outlook is the heart and core of solidarity, nationally and internationally: it is also the reason for *L.M.'s* existence. March donations totalled:

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